



NEWS RELEASE

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BETTER THAN 7 OF EVERY 10 NEBRASKA STUDENTS PROFICIENT IN READING, MATH, SCIENCE

Test scores for Nebraska public school students improved this year with better than seven of every 10 students proficient in math and science and three of every four students meeting state reading standards.

The 2014 State of the Schools report released today showed math scores improved from 63 percent in 2011 to 71 percent this year. Science scores climbed from 67 percent in 2012 to 72 percent. And, reading scores increased from 69 percent in 2010 to 77 percent. The years used for comparisons varied to provide comparable results.

"Nebraska students continue to improve their test scores and, this year, 53 percent or 132 of our school districts earned their all-time best scores when reading, math and science scores were combined," said Nebraska Education Commissioner Matt Blomstedt. "Parents and caregivers, however, are likely questioning how the federal government can consider many Nebraska schools in need of improvement when they are improving.

"The federal school accountability system is flawed and misleading. The federal system mislabels schools," he said.

"The Nebraska Department of Education does not agree with current federal policy, and I do not believe that all of our schools are low performing," Blomstedt said.

Under the federal law *No Child Left Behind*, 480 Nebraska schools and 52 districts were designated in need of improvement because 100 percent of the students were not proficient as required. As a result, federal sanctions will be applied to 265 of those schools and to 50 districts — sanctions requiring districts to set aside funds, offer school choice or tutoring or to restructure. Congress was scheduled to reauthorize the law in 2007 but that has not occurred, frustrating educators and policy makers in many states.

In the meantime, the Nebraska State Board of Education and the Nebraska Department of Education have been working on a new state accountability system, A QuESTT.

"Nebraska can do accountability right," Blomstedt said. A QuESTT will expand the current state system to look at the quality of the education practices in a school or district to ensure continuous improvement.

Continuous improvement is the key, Blomstedt said. To implement A QuESTT, Nebraska will need data that allow the state to measure more quality indicators such as, whether districts are graduating college and career ready students; school district educator effectiveness; how the school supports students transitioning between grades, programs or other schools; postsecondary and career education opportunities available to high schoolers; and, the availability and quality of parent and community engagement programs. The State Board of Education is expected to consider approving the first phase of A QuESTT in December.

The current state accountability system ranks districts on their average scale scores in reading, math and science and looks at Improvement, the differences in the average scale scores of different students in the same grade, as well as Growth, the differences in average scale scores of the same students, year to year. This year's results showed:

- Reading Improvement: 75 percent of Nebraska districts showed improvement
- Reading Growth: 82 percent of the districts showed improvement
- Math Improvement: 65 percent
- Math Growth: 62 percent
- Science Improvement: 53 percent

The State of the Schools Report is available at: <http://www.education.ne.gov/> or <http://reportcard.education.ne.gov>.